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STANDARDIZATION OF TEACHING OF SPANISH IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS

(Delivered at the Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish, December 30, 1920, Chicago, Ill.)

Those who teach in colleges or universities must have been impressed by the inequality in the preparation of the high-school students who have presented Spanish during the last few years. The condition has always existed to a greater or less degree, but since the entrance of the United States into the world war and the consequent increase in the number of students in Spanish, the variability has been more marked. That this situation is unsatisfactory to both high-school and college teachers goes without saying. It even presents elements of danger to the future success of the teaching of Spanish in this country. It is with some of the dangers of this situation and with some remedies for its betterment that the present paper is concerned.

The harmful effects of the present system, or rather lack of system, may be regarded, first, from the point of view of the student, and, secondly, from the point of view of the high-school teacher. The student who does not go to college will be least affected by present conditions. Of course, the average student will not be as well prepared to use his Spanish as one who comes from a well-planned and well-organized system, but his deficiency will not be made apparent as in the case of the student who goes to the college or to the university. It is estimated that about sixty per cent of high-school students do not go to college. In that case we should do as well as we can by the one who elects Spanish, which is not possible with present conditions. I suspect, however, that the majority of those students who elect Spanish do so because they intend to go to college or to the university.

It is the student who goes to college who really suffers from the present situation. He gets into a class composed of students who had their training in the university the year before, and of students from various high schools in the State, all with different training and by different methods. It makes no difference at what point the university teacher begins, or what his method, a large per cent of the class will be at sea for quite a while. Some will never catch up and will fail, and through no fault, necessarily, of the student or his high-school teacher. It is the fault of the situation into which the student is thrust. If the high-school teacher knew just where the university class would begin and what method would be used, at least in a general way, much time would be saved for the student and the university teacher, and possibly the student would not fail. If he does pass under our present scheme he may be so discouraged by the results of his work that he will stop as soon as he fulfills the university requirement as regards Spanish in his case. Another situation arises frequently in university classes where the students come from various high schools. A student comes into the class and finds that the material and method are so different from what he has been accustomed to that he decides that it will be impossible for him to pass in Spanish, so he leaves it

and takes up another language. Spanish each year loses a large number of students in this manner. It is no excuse for us that other languages lose students for the same reason. (They also should correct the situation, as far as it regards their language.) I am not arguing for the lazy student, either. But many ambitious students will change to another language rather than receive a low grade on the language which they had intended to study.

Probably it is occurring to some of you that students having the same training and the same methods could be put into the same class. If such does occur to you it means that you have forgotten the complexities of a university schedule. This cannot be done, at least until we get more rooms and more teachers at our universities. You may suggest that we begin back in the first year and go on from that point. That is what we are doing, at least to a great extent, but that is almost a criminal waste of time, and does not entirely overcome the difficulties of the situation.

Some one may ask if one prepares his students to go to X university with which his high school is standardized, and if some of them go to Y university, will they not be in the same relative situation as they are at present? Alas, they probably will be, and I should like to see some such organization as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish take up the question of making more nearly uniform undergraduate teaching of Spanish in our institutions of higher learning. This would not apply, of course, to advanced or graduate teaching. I realize that this is a complex problem, but it can and should be solved. It would require open-mindedness, coöperation, and perseverance on the part of the teachers concerned, but the benefits which would result from such coöperation and contact are obvious. It is taken for granted that in a given institution uniformity obtains in the elementary courses of Spanish. Otherwise confusion will be found in the advanced courses, although to a less degree than would obtain in an elementary one.

If the student suffers from these conditions, the teacher suffers no less than the student. While the teacher whose student does not go to the university receives little regard or censure, as the case may be, as his product is not subjected to any test, poor teaching will react on the teacher. If, on the other hand, the high-school graduate goes to the university and does poor work or fails, the high-school teacher and his school are criticized. Now, as intimated before, the teacher may have trained the pupil well, but when he gets into the university the approach to the subject is changed, and he does poor work, the teacher, consequently, being censured. A more uniform system would prevent this and give the high-school teacher a just evaluation.

The poor teacher's pupil might, under the proper circumstances, receive as good a grade as the pupil of the good teacher, under our present scheme. In other words, where there is little or no standardization, the good teacher's work may not be rewarded and the poor teacher's work may not be censured.

Another and imperative reason for the improving and standardizing of the teaching of Spanish in the high schools is the tendency to remove elementary modern language teaching from the universities and put it back into the high schools. The University of Chicago has already done this, and other institutions are considering the advisability of removing first-year French

from the curriculum. Some of these institutions would like to remove Spanish elementary work, but they are waiting until Spanish is better taught in the high schools. Its turn will come later, and the high schools should prepare for this by organizing and standardizing their work. If the elementary Spanish is removed from the universities the whole responsibility will rest on the high schools. (If you think it impossible or improbable that this come to pass, look at the history of mathematics, for instance.) It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of Spanish as a popular language in this country will be decided by the efficiency of the high school. In many of the State universities from one-third to one-half or more of the entire enrollment in Spanish is in the first year. You can readily see what the high-school enrollment will be if that work or a greater part of it is transferred to the high school. You can see also how much more complicated will be the task of the university teacher and students when all the students come from high schools. With our present situation standardization would seem desirable; with the prospect of the high schools doing almost all the elementary work in Spanish it would seem imperative.

Still another reason for improving the teaching of Spanish is the reaction which has set in against it. One of the causes of the reaction against Spanish is the fact that in many schools the teachers were poorly prepared. The pupils could not learn, and so they quit the language. That condition was especially true of Spanish. The French, for instance, had a sort of reserve of teachers on which it could draw, the Spanish had no such reserve. In addition to that peculiar difficulty Spanish is suffering from the general reaction against modern languages. An article in the October number of *The Modern Language Journal* by the late Dr. Calvin Thomas, Professor of German at Columbia University, suggests that most foreign language teaching is unnecessary, and hence an injustice to the student. I need not say that I disagree with Professor Thomas, but his article does express the opinion of many who are not teachers of foreign languages and who exert influence in the councils of the mighty. This opinion is strengthened by the report that many of our former students of French were unable to use the language when they were in France during the war. Whatever we teachers of modern languages may think of such a report, it is an argument which may be used to convince administrative authorities of the uselessness of modern language teaching. It seems to me that we should try to stop this reaction before it acquires any momentum. There never was a time when the country needed to encourage modern language teaching and modern language teachers more than now. But "God helps those who help themselves," and the teachers must do something to show that they and their work deserve more credit.

Since "standardization" has been suggested as a remedy for some of the evils noted, it may be well to determine more exactly what is meant by standardization. "Standardization" for the purposes of this paper does not mean absolute uniformity in authors, texts, or methods. Such a program would devitalize the teaching of Spanish, and would prevent, to a great extent at least, initiative and individuality on the part of the teacher. What I have in mind is a standardization which will cause the students' knowledge of Spanish at the end of their high-school courses to be more nearly uniform than

it is at present. That is, I would reduce the variability of the high-school students who graduate in Spanish at the end of a given period, say two years, to a minimum. Such a standardization will have to be within relatively restricted areas. The correct norm in Spanish for a high-school graduate in Texas, say, might not be suitable in New Jersey. The largest unit within which uniformity may be attained is, probably, the State, and in the case of our larger city school systems, the city. Another reason for making the State or large city the unit is the State and city teachers' associations, organizations ready to hand to work out and put into operation such a plan as is outlined here. Also each State has its university, which should, and in fact *must*, coöperate if the plan is to be a success.

Provided that approximate uniformity can be obtained, what should be the standard? As a general rule I suggest that the minimum be that the high-school graduate who elects Spanish be required to read, write, understand, and speak simple Spanish prose, that is, at the end of a two years' course. That requirement is not too high, as some of you may imagine. It can be done—it is being done in many of the high schools of this country—and I see no reason for setting a standard lower than that now being maintained by many of our high schools. It may be that some high schools can not attain that standard at the beginning, but it should certainly be their aim at least to achieve that much eventually.

The main problem in our present scheme, as well as in the proposed one, is the teacher. There are in Spanish a large number of poorly prepared teachers. That is the natural result of such a sudden and large increase in the number of students electing Spanish. But if we would keep what students we have, to say nothing of attracting more, we must improve the teacher. The means to do this lie mainly with the teachers themselves. The poorly prepared teacher should take courses in the Spanish language and literature, as well as courses for teachers, during the school year if near some good institution, or during the summer in case it is not possible to do so during the winter months. He should read the literature on the teaching of Spanish, especially such periodicals as *HISPANIA* and the *Modern Language Journal*. He should be an active member of his local and State teachers' organizations, and develop within those organizations a section devoted entirely to Spanish, if possible. This is important. In most State and local associations there is not enough time to devote to both French and Spanish in these sectional meetings, and Spanish is certainly important enough and large enough to justify a special section. Finally the teacher should spend a summer at least in a Spanish-speaking country. If such a trip is impossible, he should take courses in a good institution where native teachers are available. As to the teacher who refuses to improve himself, I should say that the progressive teachers in any local organization should set such an excellent standard that no one could fail to see that that teacher was below par in the group.

Granted excellent teachers, the next problem is to agree on a program. That will require coöperation and some self-sacrifice. And after the plan has been determined it will require competent supervision. I do not mean supervision of the disagreeable, nagging type, but sympathetic, helpful supervision. However willing a group of teachers may be, there must be some one to

check up on the work and see that each one is following the program in a general way. And, as intimated before, there is the vital point of securing the sympathetic coöperation of institutions of higher learning to which students will go after graduation. I think it will be the exceptional university which will not coöperate in such a case if the high-school teachers let it be known that they want to work out some such coöperative scheme as has been set forth here.

I have tried to make clear the need for better teaching and more uniform teaching in a limited area, say the State. This improvement can come about only by and through the teachers themselves. If they will organize thoroughly, plan carefully, and then carry out their program, they will receive the recognition and reward that their efforts deserve.

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HIGH SCHOOLS THAT OFFER SPANISH

The publishing house of D. C. Heath & Company, New York City, has just completed an investigation of the number of high schools in each State which offer Spanish. The following table gives the figures obtained. These statistics are only approximately correct, as new schools are being added continually to the list.

Alabama	47	Louisiana	29	Oklahoma	33
Arizona	14	Maine	26	Oregon	55
Arkansas	15	Maryland	38	Pennsylvania	293
California	265	Massachusetts	99	Rhode Island.....	11
Colorado	50	Michigan	49	South Carolina.....	15
Connecticut	40	Minnesota	25	South Dakota.....	14
Delaware	7	Mississippi	57	Tennessee	108
District of		Missouri	32	Texas	136
Columbia	33	Nebraska	48	Utah	3
Florida	79	Nevada	16	Vermont	12
Georgia	83	New Hampshire....	16	Virginia	63
Idaho	20	New Jersey	133	Washington	99
Illinois	59	New Mexico	24	West Virginia.....	54
Indiana	43	New York	402	Wisconsin	19
Iowa	45	North Carolina.....	58	Wyoming	3
Kansas	63	North Dakota.....	13		
Kentucky	15	Ohio	82	Total	2943